



Global Interfaith Partnership - Indiana

SUMMER 2008



Congregation Beth El Zedeck Rabbis Dennis and Sandy Sasso greet Joseph after he spoke at Shabbat services May 3, 2008.

Greetings from Joseph Okuya

Umoja Project Director Joseph Okuya sends these greetings to Indianapolis congregations following his Indiana visit in May 2008:

Love and greetings to you of the community of the Global Interfaith Partnership in Indiana. Before my visit, we had heard much about each other yet remained largely abstract. Occasioned by that visit, we are both now able to attach facial identity to what we knew not previously. I must confess that it was verily uplifting to meet and interact with you all as individuals as well as groups. I experienced the warmth of being in your midst and heartily express my realization of your brotherly love. It is this love and warmth that I now bear and convey as I tell the story back in Kenya.

I am certain that you will all find it relieving to learn that I was granted safe travel mercies and found my family in perfect health. They were more than pleased to receive me from you and appreciated the great care you had given unto me as I sojourned among you.

I also bring to you the greetings from certain of the Coalition families at Chulaimbo, Kenya, which I have received upon resumption of duty. They too were glad to have me back and were overly joyful to hear about you and your devotion to the noble pursuit of justice and mercy on a common front.

Receive even more gratitude from the orphans and vulnerable children who are now receiving meals as part of the Interfaith Partnership's school feeding program. It is unfortunate that you are not here to behold them exuberant with glee and honest smiles of gratitude. This is the fruit of conjoint labor. I am sure that as we expand in the width and depth of our service delivery, these once destitute children will have the empowered community as an extension of your embrace; a shoulder to lean on, easing away their agony, advocating for their justice and granting them mercy, thereby contributing in making the world a better place for posterity.

It is my sincere hope and prayer that this special approach of tying together congregations, schools and guardians in the care of orphans and vulnerable children through community empowerment and global partnerships in the likeness of the Global Interfaith Partnership will be good news and shall spur each one of us to go out and bring many others on board that our common vision may be realized. I am persuaded that we can, all together, make it. I have personally pledged to make it happen at the grass root level as your humble servant, even your emissary. With your backing, it is already happening.

May we therefore strengthen our arms, lift up our spirits, broaden our horizons and fire up one another that we may not fail? May the good Lord keep us all toiling in the vineyard till end of day? May nothing distract our focus, our intent and our inspiration? May we daily find in us a reason to share even what would have been deemed minute of others knowing that to others it means their very existence? May the joy of fellowship in service delivery across faith convictions ever redefine our boundaries?

I love and miss you all. Once more, thank you for hosting me and standing with Umoja.

Yours in service,
Joseph Okuya

Umoja Project Food Security Initiative

New to the Umoja Project's work in 2008 is its Food Security Initiative. As Project Director Joseph Okuya began working with Chulaimbo's schools and congregations in 2007, repeatedly he was told about the number of children who live in homes with little or no food. These children go home for the daily lunch break but return to school in the afternoon without having had anything to eat. The schools identified hunger as the major contributor to school absenteeism and were eager for Umoja to help them respond to this problem.

The Food Security Initiative quickly has become an exciting component of Umoja's work! 10 primary schools have responded to the challenge to work with household guardians to develop an agricultural project. Together, the school personnel and guardians have determined where there is tillable land, who will plant and maintain the crop, etc.



Chulaimbo Primary School students enjoy lunch

To show their commitment to the project, each school made a 25% match to Umoja's purchase of seeds. The first crop, to be harvested in July, should be sufficient for each of the 10 schools to provide lunch to 100 students each (1000 students total) for the remainder of the year. Until harvest, Umoja is purchasing maize and beans for the schools so they can proceed with the lunch program right away.

In addition to the program in schools, Umoja maintains its own emergency food bank for households not connected to the schools or needing additional help, as well as for the 3 months out of the year when school is not in session. To the extent possible the maize and beans for this food bank is bought directly from guardians, giving them an income opportunity while helping their neighbors. Everyone wins – the households needing the food, the guardians needing a source of income, and Umoja establishing itself as a creative partner in the development of the community.

As important as the food itself is, of equal value is the hope, excitement and cooperative work generated by the project! Umoja's real strength is that it truly is a grassroots initiative. In just one year of work, there already is much evidence of transformation resulting from the guardians, schools and congregations believing that they have the capacity to create change.

Interfaith Hunger Initiative Partners with GIP-Indiana

In Fall 2007, Jim Morris, former head of the UN's World Food Program, challenged Indianapolis area congregations with the reminder that all faith traditions encourage feeding the hungry. In response to this challenge, a growing number of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and other faith leaders are participating in the new Interfaith Hunger Initiative (IHI). IHI has established the goal of raising \$300,000 by the end of 2008 to help feed hungry children locally and globally. Half of the funds raised will go to Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana; the other half will go to GIP-Indiana's Umoja Project.

This new partnership provides an exciting opportunity for the Umoja Project! IHI funds will be used to expand our school-based lunch program into more of Maseno Division's primary schools.

Recommended Reading

Creating a World without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism by Muhammed Yunus.

Yunus, a native of Bangladesh, is the founder and managing director of the Grameen Bank and a pioneer in microcredit, the economic movement that has helped lift millions of families around the world out of poverty. The book offers some early examples of social business, where the creative vision of the entrepreneur is applied to today's most serious problems: feeding the poor, housing the homeless, healing the sick, and protecting the planet. Yunus and Grameen Bank are winners of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize. (Amazon)

GIP-Indiana Implements New Governance Structure

In January, the GIP steering committee approved a new membership and governance structure. Our goal is to encourage as many congregations as possible to join the Partnership and at the same time to recognize that decision-making authority should rest with the congregations who have made a substantial investment in our work. Each of our "partnering congregations" – defined as any congregation whose annual support is at least \$5 per congregational household – has one representative serving on GIP's new Board of Advisors. To date, we have 10 partnering congregations, including:

Congregation Beth El Zedeck
Faith Missionary
North United Methodist
St. Joan of Arc Catholic
St. Luke's United Methodist
St. Monica Catholic
St. Paul's Episcopal
St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic
Second Presbyterian
Tabernacle Presbyterian

The Board of Advisors is beginning its work by engaging in a strategic planning process. While North UMC member Jessica White (www.jessicawhiteassociates.com) is leading us through questions about strengthening organizational efforts here in Indiana, we also are collaborating with GIP-Chulaimbo to determine how best to move forward in meeting the needs of the vulnerable households served by the Umoja Project. In the coming months our two coalitions will be grappling with "big picture" questions as:

- How do we create an effective balance between relief services which meet immediate needs and community development services which build the capacity of households and the overall community to be self-sustaining?
- How do we balance our desire to respond in depth to individual and community needs with our desire to expand the number of schools and communities served by the Umoja Project?

Benefit Carnival 2008

Don't miss the fun! Bring all your friends to the carnival benefiting the Umoja Project!

Several months ago, youth from Second Presbyterian and 91st Street Christian began the process of organizing this September's carnival to benefit the Umoja Project. Youth from seven congregations and several schools have joined the planning team and have done an amazing job handling all planning details. The carnival promises to be great fun for all ages!

Human Bowling, Dunk Tank, Moonwalks, Bungee Trampoline, Adrenaline Rush Obstacle Course, Rock Climbing Wall, Bungie Run, Face Painting, Craft Tent, Carnival Games galore, and a special "Kiddie Land" for little ones are just a few of the activities. Save the date and join the fun!

**FUN FOR ALL AGES!!!
HELP US GET THE WORD OUT TO LOCAL
CONGREGATION AND OTHER FRIENDS!**



Joseph Okuya meets with the interfaith youth carnival planning committee at Second Presbyterian Movie Night.

**September 6, 2008 2:00-6:00pm
(Rain Date September 7th)**

**Second Presbyterian Church
7700 N. Meridian Street
Indianapolis, Indiana**

www.kenyacarnival.com

For more information about the Global Interfaith Partnership and the Umoja Project, please contact

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